



KUSKOKWIM AREA NEWS RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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2011 Kuskokwim Area Salmon Fishery News Release 1 2011 Kuskokwim Area Salmon Outlook and Management Strategy

KUSKOKWIM RIVER

2011 KUSKOKWIM RIVER SALMON OUTLOOK

The Kuskokwim Area has no formal forecast for salmon returns. Broad expectations are developed based on parent-year escapements and recent year trends. The 2011 Chinook, sockeye, and coho salmon abundance is expected to be similar to 2010, while chum salmon returns are expected to exceed the 2010 abundance. Anticipated available surpluses for commercial harvest will range from 0 to 10,000 Chinook; 20,000 to 30,000 sockeye; 200,000 to 300,000 chum; and 60,000 to 150,000 coho salmon. Markets and processing capacity are expected to be similar to last year.

2011 KUSKOKWIM RIVER MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

State and federal fishery management staff will continue to follow guidelines outlined in the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan **5 ACC 07.365**, to the extent possible, to achieve escapement goals, provide for subsistence use, and allow commercial fishing on available harvestable surpluses. A subsistence fishing schedule will not be in effect at the start of the 2011 season.

However, it is anticipated that preseason management actions will be taken and jointly recommended by the ADF&G and USFWS in an attempt to conserve and achieve Chinook salmon escapement goals. After public input, a separate news release in May will describe the 2011 Chinook salmon management strategy. Additional inseason management actions may be implemented in response to weaker than anticipated return to the Kuskokwim River drainage.

Subsistence Fishery

Subsistence fishing is anticipated to be open 7 days per week with the exception of closures 6 hours before, during, and 3 hours after each commercial fishing period, **unless superseded by Emergency Order**. In District 1, when one subdistrict is open to commercial fishing, subsistence fishing will be allowed in the majority of the other subdistrict. During closed periods,

subsistence fishing for species other than salmon will be allowed with gillnets not exceeding 60 feet in length and a mesh size of 4 inches or less.

Subsistence hook and line fishing for any species of salmon will be allowed 7 days per week, **unless superseded by Emergency Order**. Bag and possession limits for Aniak River upstream of Doestock Creek are 10 fish per day. Of those fish, the daily bag and possession limit for salmon is 3, of which 2 can be Chinook salmon 20 inches or greater in length.

Commercial Fishery

District 1

As directed by the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Plan, a commercial fishery may be prosecuted in June and July if salmon abundance is above the amounts necessary to meet escapement goals and subsistence use. Processing capacity will limit commercial openings in District 1 to alternating subdistrict openings. Commercial openings may be announced when no large scale buyers are available to provide opportunity for permit holders operating as catcher/sellers or catcher/processors. Contact the ADF&G office in Bethel for more information about the catcher/seller or catcher/processor programs.

All commercial fishing periods will be limited to gillnets with 6-inch or smaller mesh size. As in 2010, there is the potential for opening the Lower Section of Subdistrict 1B for two additional hours during commercial openings, dependent on salmon abundance and processor capacity.

Chinook salmon abundance, escapement and subsistence needs may limit commercial harvest of chum and sockeye salmon in late June early July. A commercial fishery directed at coho salmon is anticipated in late July and August.

Sport Fishery

Within the management plan, the sport fisheries for Chinook and chum salmon are to be managed based on abundance. It is anticipated that preseason management actions on sport fishing will be taken to conserve and achieve Chinook salmon escapement goals.

Additional inseason restrictions may be implemented in response to weaker than anticipated salmon runs in other Kuskokwim River tributaries as necessary. The Kuskokwim River drainage Chinook salmon sport fishing season will close by regulation on July 26.

Inseason Assessment and Research

Inseason indicators of salmon run strength include the Bethel Test Fishery, subsistence catch reports, commercial catch statistics, aerial surveys, sonar, weirs, and additional tributary escapement monitoring projects operated by an assortment of partnerships between State, Federal, and Tribal organizations. Staff from Orutsararmiut Native Council will survey Bethel Area subsistence fishermen to assess salmon run timing and abundance.

KUSKOKWIM BAY

2011 KUSKOKWIM BAY OUTLOOK

The Kuskokwim Bay has no formal forecast for salmon returns. Broad expectations are developed based on parent-year escapements and recent year trends. It is expected that salmon harvest in 2011 will be similar to 2010. Anticipated available surpluses for commercial harvest are expected to range from 10,000 to 17,000 Chinook; 80,000 to 160,000 sockeye; 90,000 to 140,000 chum; and 20,000 to 60,000 coho salmon. Harvest may be affected by salmon abundance, participation, market conditions, and processor capacity.

2011 KUSKOKWIM BAY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Subsistence Fishery

Department staff will be in contact with Kuskokwim Bay subsistence fishermen to determine if subsistence needs will be met. Subsistence fishing will be allowed 7 days per week prior to the commercial salmon fishing season. Once the commercial fishing season begins, subsistence fishery closures will be reduced by emergency order from 16 hours before, during, and 6 hours after, to 8 hours before, during, and 4 hours after each commercial fishing period.

Commercial Fishery

District 4

The Department intends to meet with Quinhagak residents prior to the commercial fishing season. The District 4 commercial fishery will be managed in accordance with the District 4 Salmon Management Plan **5 ACC 07.367**. By regulation, the commercial salmon fishery is to open prior to June 16. Commercial fishing periods are established by emergency order. The department shall allow for at least one 12-hour period per week unless a serious conservation problem develops. Additional commercial fishing periods may be announced if salmon abundance warrants. District 4 will open under Chinook salmon directed management. Once the sockeye salmon catch comprises more than 50% of the combined sockeye and Chinook salmon commercial catch, the district will be managed based on sockeye salmon abundance. A coho salmon management directed fishery is anticipated to occur late July through August given adequate run strength.

District 5

The Department intends to meet with Goodnews Bay area residents prior to the commercial fishing season. It is anticipated the District 5 commercial fishery will open during the last week of June, given adequate Chinook salmon abundance. Commercial fishing periods are established by emergency order and it is anticipated the Department will allow for a minimum of one 12-hour period per week. Additional fishing periods may occur provided adequate abundance and processor capacity.

Sport Fishery

Within the District 4 Salmon Management Plan, sport fisheries are managed based on abundance and commercial fishery performance. If necessary, additional inseason restrictions will be implemented in accordance with District 4 Salmon Management Plan. Sport fishing daily bag and possession limits for Chinook salmon is 3 per day with only 2 over 28 inches. The Kuskokwim Bay Chinook salmon sport-fishing season will close by regulation July 26.

Inseason Assessment and Research

Inseason indicators of salmon run strength include weir escapement projects, verbal subsistence catch reports, aerial surveys, and commercial catch statistics. Weirs will be operated on the Kanektok and the Middle Fork Goodnews rivers to monitor salmon escapements and collect biological data. It is anticipated that the Kanektok River weir will cease operations in mid-August to address operational concerns caused by high water events common in August and September.

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